



Applying for AAALAC International Accreditation

Applying for AAALAC International accreditation is a two-phase process. The first phase is an extensive internal review of all aspects of your animal care and use program. The second phase is an external evaluation conducted by AAALAC representatives. Here's an overview of the steps involved...

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How do we apply for accreditation?

Before you begin the application process, be sure to review the "Rules of Accreditation" to make sure your institution is eligible to apply. The Rules are available online at: www.aaalac.org/accreditation/rules.cfm (see also "Steps to Earning Accreditation").

If your institution is eligible, request an application package from the AAALAC International office, or download one from AAALAC's web site (www.aaalac.org/accreditation/apply.cfm). The application package will include a two-page "Application for Accreditation" form. It also contains:

- Instructions that will guide you through preparing your "Program Description," the key document used by AAALAC's Council on Accreditation to evaluate your animal care and use program. The instructions contain a complete list of all of the information you need to include.
- Formatting (word processing) and submission instructions and other helpful tools for completing aspects of the Program Description.
- The Three Primary Standards used by the Council to evaluate programs are: the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide)*, NRC 2011; the *Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Research and Teaching (Ag Guide)*, FASS 2010; and the European Convention for the Protection of Vertebrate Animals Used for Experimental and Other Scientific Purposes, Council of Europe (ETS 123). Council also uses a number of international guidelines and a list of

additional resources during the assessment process as appropriate to the location of the program. (These resources are available online at: www.aaalac.org/accreditation/resources.cfm.)

How much does accreditation cost?

There is an application fee which covers the cost of the initial site visit. After your institution earns accreditation, there is then an annual fee which covers the cost of regular site revisits. Both of these fees are based on a sliding scale that generally correlates with the size of your animal facilities. The fee scale is available online at: www.aaalac.org/accreditation/fees.cfm.

What should we include in our Program Description?

Your Program Description will include current information on your institution's:

- Animal care and use program
- Animal environment, housing and management
- Veterinary care
- Physical plant

The Program Description instructions you receive (or download) will take you step-by-step through the process of preparing this information. The internal review inherent in the development of your Program Description will help your institution identify and address weaknesses, resulting in improved animal well-being and sound science.

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What happens after we submit our application package?

You will receive confirmation from the AAALAC International office that your application and Program Description have been received.

Next, your application undergoes an administrative review to make sure that your program meets the criteria listed in the Rules of Accreditation. You will be asked to submit an application fee which is based on the size of your animal facility. This fee may also be submitted with your application materials.

Next, a site visit team, made up of two or more AAALAC International Council Members and ad hoc Consultants/Specialists, is assigned to review your institution's animal care and use program. The AAALAC International office will provide you with the names and affiliations of the site visit team members. A member of the AAALAC International Council will contact you to schedule the visit. Site visits typically take one or two days to complete, depending on the size and complexity of your program.

What can we expect during the site visit?

Your site visit will start with an "in-briefing," during which key institutional members meet with the site visit team to discuss the accreditation process.

After the in-briefing, the site visit team will sit down with a smaller group from your institution to go over your Program Description. (The team will have thoroughly reviewed your Program Description before the visit.) This gives the team members an opportunity to ask specific questions or request additional documents.

Next, you will take the team on a tour of your facilities. At a convenient point, you and the team will break for lunch.

Typically, members of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee or comparable oversight body are invited to join the site visit team for lunch to discuss the Committee's activities and other issues pertinent to your institution. After the tour, the team may ask you for additional information on specific protocols or procedures.

Toward the end of the day, the site visit team will meet (alone) to hold an "executive session." During this session, they discuss their key observations and information they want to share with you right away.

Finally, an "Exit Briefing" is held for members of your institution, as deemed appropriate by the institution's leadership. The team will share their key findings and what they intend to recommend to the Council regarding your accreditation status. At this point you have an opportunity to correct any misperceptions the site visit team may have. After the visit, they will document their findings and recommendations in an official site visit report.

Post Site Visit Communication

You may also formally respond to the site visit team's initial findings through what is called "Post Site Visit Communication" (PSVC). PSVC is a letter and accompanying documentation that you submit to address any misperceptions, or explain how your institution is already responding to concerns raised during the Exit Briefing. Complete details on the Exit Briefing and the PSVC process are available online at: www.aaalac.org/publications/ibrief.cfm.

What happens after the site visit?

The Council on Accreditation makes all final decisions regarding accreditation. The Council meets three times a year (January, May and September), so your application and site visit report will be considered during the first Council meeting that follows your visit. Prior to the meeting, at least four

additional Council members will review and comment on the site visit report.

During the Council deliberations, the Council member that visited your institution will act as your representative, describing your program and sharing his or her observations. Based on the discussions that follow, a letter is drafted that explains your accreditation status. After the Council meeting, the letter is individually reviewed, edited and approved by members of the Council and AAALAC staff. You should receive official notification of your accreditation within four to eight weeks after the Council meeting.

How do we maintain accreditation?

If your institution is awarded AAALAC International accreditation, you will need to submit an annual report every year. The report provides current program information, and explains any changes made to your animal care and use program during the previous year.

To maintain accreditation, subsequent site visits are held every three years and follow the same process just described.

What if we have more questions?

If you have additional questions about the accreditation process, your application package, your accreditation status, or specific questions related to your program, don't hesitate to contact the AAALAC International office. AAALAC International and its Council members are always available to help you achieve and maintain excellence in your animal care and use program—so be sure to utilize these resources!*

** If you are not familiar with the accreditation process, or not sure how your program compares to AAALAC standards, you may choose to first apply for a Program Status Evaluation (PSE) which serves as a "pre-accreditation" service. (Visit www.aaalac.org/programstatus/index.cfm for more information.)*

